



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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EXHIBITION OF PHOTOGRAPHS BY BIRNEY IMES AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART CELEBRATES THE LIFE OF A MISSISSIPPI ROAD HOUSE

(Cleveland, OH) A new exhibition, **Birney Imes Photographs: Whispering Pines**, is on view June 7–August 14, 1997, in gallery 105 at the Cleveland Museum of Art. Included are 17 large color photographs made by photographer Birney Imes (b. 1942) at the Whispering Pines, a rural restaurant and variety store in the countryside near his home of Columbus, in central Mississippi. Tom Hinson, the museum's curator of contemporary art and photography, organized the exhibition. Admission is free.

Five miles north of Brooksville on highway 45, near the town of Crawford, is a low cinder-block building with a 1940s neon sign stretching across the top that says "Whispering Pines." Inside is what some might call a mess—four decades worth of stuff accumulated by Blume Tiptlett, the proprietor of the Whispering Pines, who died in 1991 at age 88. The doors haven't opened to the public since then.

"Birney Imes has a key to Whispering Pines," says Tom Hinson. "The photographer befriended Blume Tiptlett in the 1970s and began to photograph in the Whispering Pines during the 1980s. This project chronicles the last decade or so—before and after the doors closed—through portraits of the cigar-smoking Tiptlett and the other employees and patrons of the place, and through still-life arrangements made from a seemingly endless supply of quirky and evocative subject matter including everything from the ubiquitous cigar boxes to fishing lures, bullets, newspaper clippings, hand-scrawled cash balance sheets, and hundreds of Tiptlett's snapshots of family and friends (including Imes)."

The pictures tell a history far beyond their own years: it appears that everything that ever was in the building in these past 40 years is still there, along with evidence of everything that ever happened. In its 1950s and 60s heyday as a bustling roadhouse, people came from all around to eat, drink, and dance at the Whispering Pines. Blues musician Big Joe Williams was a regular act. There was (and still is) a hedge in the back parking lot delineating the White Side from the Black Side. Inside the walls, there were two establishments. Blume and his wife Eppie presided over the White Side, and Rosie Stevenson, an employee of the Whispering Pines since the late 50s (and inheritor of the property), operated the Black Side. With the passage of time, the racial barriers gradually gave way to practical concerns, and by the mid 80s the business operated exclusively out of what had been the Black Side; the former White Side, clogged with accumulated keepsake debris, became known as the "archives." Says Tom Hinson, "Imes has made a compelling and many-layered record of one man's life, a social era, and a physical place in these remarkable and unusual photographs."

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Press Release